

**Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**San Rafael Junior High School
420 West 500 South
Ferron, Utah 84423**

February 9, 2005



Utah State Office of Education
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Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

**THE REPORT OF THE
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**San Rafael Junior High School
420 West 500 South
Ferron, Utah 84523**

February 9, 2005

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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Salt Lake City, Utah

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FOREWORD

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase student achievement.

In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes. It is a three-phased evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, February 9, 2005, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of San Rafael Junior High School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the visiting team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Garth Johnson is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at San Rafael Junior High School, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at San Rafael Junior High School.

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State Superintendent
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SAN RAFAEL JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Counseling

Karen Bishop Counselor

Support Staff

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Sandra Gee
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Jodi Willson
Brandy Yates

SAN RAFAEL JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

MISSION STATEMENT

To prepare every student with the knowledge, skills, values, and vision for lifelong success in a changing world.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

We believe that students have the right to learn in a positive, affirmative, safe environment with established rules, guidelines and reasonable, consistent consequences.

We believe that students will be most successful in an environment which provides opportunity for individual growth and accommodates various learning styles.

We believe that education is a cooperative effort among students, home, school, and community.

We believe that teachers should be positive role models for students.

We believe technology is a vital tool in student success.

We believe that improving reading skills will enhance student achievement.

We believe that extracurricular activities are important to develop and create well rounded, healthy individuals.

We believe that a variety of tools should be used to assess student knowledge, skills, and achievement.

We believe teachers should continually improve their professional knowledge and skills.

We believe that learning occurs when students assume their full share of responsibility in the learning process.

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Ben Lems, Olympus Junior High School, Granite School District,
Visiting Team Chairperson

James Stocks, Monticello High School, San Juan School District

Nick Young, Eisenhower Junior High School, Granite School District

VISITING TEAM REPORT
SAN RAFAEL JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

San Rafael Junior High School has been at its present location for 27 years. It currently has a student population of 309 in grades 7, 8, and 9. San Rafael Junior High has a staff of 18 teachers, a principal, and a part-time counselor. They have a traditional seven-period daily schedule, with a 20-minute advisory period used primarily for reading.

a) What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?

Data shows that student achievement on national and state tests has been consistent over the years, and scores are generally slightly above district and state averages.

Attendance at parent/teacher conferences has been a concern for a number of years. Several efforts have been made to accommodate parents and encourage them to attend. These efforts include holding parent/teacher conferences on two consecutive evenings, inviting parents to come to the school during the day, and extending the hours of parent/teacher conferences to 9:00 p.m. in the evening.

Opportunities for professional development are a concern due to San Rafael Junior High's funding and rural location and. There is a need for teachers to have more time to collaborate on the integration of curricula and explore best practices.

b) What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?

The staff of San Rafael Junior High understands the need to systematically collect and analyze data in order to guide decisions made by the school. The data needs to be disaggregated into a user-friendly format that is relevant and available to the staff in a timely manner. The school should collaborate with the district to assist in the desegregation of state and national criterion- and norm-referenced tests. This effort should extend to disaggregating test data by student group, gender, grade level, and ethnicity.

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

- Both the State Core tests and the IOWA test data should be disaggregated by student group, gender, grade level, and ethnicity. Staff members are encouraged

to use this information to integrate their knowledge of individual student data into their practice.

- The staff members of San Rafael Junior High have done a good job analyzing their self-study to develop an effective action plan. The staff should continue to gather data to update and make midcourse corrections to the plan as needed.

CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS

- a) *To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?*

The Visiting Team found, through the self-study and interviews with staff members, parents, and students, that all stakeholders were invited to participate in the self-study and accreditation process. Departments and focus groups included members of the staff, parents, and students in their evaluations. The School Community Council was also given opportunities for input and was kept apprised of the self-study process and the progress being made. Both parents and students indicated that their voices were heard as assessments and decisions pertaining to the self-study were made.

- b) *To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?*

The staff did an excellent job of assessing the school through the department analyses for classroom effectiveness and through the focus groups' evaluations of school-wide effectiveness. The work done by each department and focus group reflects a significant effort to identify areas of strength and limitations. Recommendations made by each group show a desire to work toward increasing student achievement.

CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

San Rafael Junior High School's desired results for student learning (DRSLs) are as follows:

1. Lifelong Learning: Basic knowledge and skills necessary to support continuing education.

2. Complex Thinking: Capability of utilizing and adapting to a variety of critical and creative thinking strategies to solve complex problems both independently and collaboratively.
3. Effective Communication: Ability to successfully interact with others using a variety of media and appropriate technology.
4. Collaboration: Ability to successfully collaborate in team situations, in subject areas, and extra-curricular activities.
5. Responsible Citizenship: Personal responsibility for improving the quality of citizenship by developing life skills, including hard work, service, integrity, and dependability for the promotion of personal and public good.
6. Employability: Understanding that skills and attributes which promote success in school will also help them be successful at a future workplace.

Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:

- a) *To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?*

The shared vision, beliefs, mission, and goals were developed in conjunction with the other focus groups, in order to facilitate an ongoing consensus building process. Stakeholders were given opportunities to provide input and feedback through the focus groups, School Community Council, and faculty meetings. Interviews with parents, teachers, and students indicate the process resulted in a vision that will direct the school toward the future.

- b) *To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?*

The belief statements support the mission statement and indicate that the school community is dedicated to student achievement and success.

- c) *To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?*

Faculty members who reviewed the Life Skills publication from the USOE and chose to use the same categories developed the DRSLs. A committee then articulated a statement for each DRSL to reflect the skills and attributes students should have, and align them to the school mission and beliefs. The DRSLs should have measurable outcomes that can be reviewed and evaluated regularly to ensure that they remain aligned with the school's mission and beliefs.

Curriculum Development:

- a) *To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?*

The Visiting Team found that the staff is familiar with the Utah Core Curriculum and strives to align the school's curriculum with the State Core. Some collaboration has taken place within departments to align core concepts. There has also been some effort made among staff members to integrate curricula across departments. The Visiting Team encourages the staff to find time and methods for integrating core concepts within departments and across all content areas and grade levels to foster collegiality and provide cross-curricular connections for students.

- b) *To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning?*

The staff has identified its desired results for student learning and come to consensus on the DRSLs' importance. However, they have not determined explicitly how the DRSLs will be taught in the individual classes across the content areas. The Visiting Team recommends that the staff determine, individually and collectively, how to implement the DRSLs into their respective curricula and how to teach and assess these outcomes.

The Visiting Team feels that a more definitive reference to the Utah Life Skills curriculum will enhance the implementation of the DRSLs by providing the indicators of student performance.

Quality Instructional Design:

- a) *To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?*

The Visiting Team was impressed with the willingness of the teachers to accommodate students through a variety of instructional and assessment techniques to ensure student understanding of concepts. Teachers demonstrated a willingness to work one-on-one with students. Students appeared to be challenged by the material, yet not overwhelmed. A variety of technologies were utilized in the classroom to support instruction.

The staff identified the need to spend more effort in interdisciplinary collaboration. After reviewing the report and interviewing teachers, the Visiting Team would also recommend more effort in this area.

- b) *To what extent does the professional staff employ a variety of instructional strategies to ensure the needs of different learners are met?*

The faculty recognizes the need to use varied instruction strategies. A variety of methods and strategies were observed to foster the learning process. It is apparent that teachers make an intentional effort to accommodate varied learning styles in the classroom. The Visiting Team compliments the efforts of those teachers who understand and use a wide variety of instruction to support student learning.

- c) *To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?*

Teachers are involved in organizing and sponsoring clubs such as the National Junior Honor Society, Technology Student Association, FCCLA, Readers Club, Author's Club, Web Page Design, Peer Helpers, and Junior Peer Helpers. There are many teachers who coach extracurricular activities, such as football, basketball, and volleyball. The after-school homework program appears to be of great assistance to many students.

Quality Assessment Systems:

- a) *To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?*

As a result of multiple classroom observations and various conversations with multiple stakeholders, several observations were made related to assessment. Some of the teachers and departments have made noticeable efforts to create assessments of student learning that are aligned with expectations for student achievement, while others still seem to struggle with this new concept. Performance standards do not appear to be fully developed on a school-wide basis. As it relates to standardized tests, the staff is encouraged to disaggregate data to help them see who is not learning.

- b) *To what extent are assessments of student learning developed using methods that reflect the intended purpose and performance standards?*

There is strong evidence to support the notion that this staff has developed an understanding and appreciation for the importance of using multiple assessments in evaluating student performance. Such an understanding is vital if student performance is to be assessed accurately and fairly. The following types of assessments were observed during the team's visit: open-ended questions, portfolios, oral presentation, projects, peer evaluations, and group assignments.

- c) *To what extent are assessments designed, developed, and used in a fair and equitable manner?*

The Visiting Team is confident that the staff is committed to fair and equitable assessments of student performance. The school's self-study mentions that this is an area in which some work is needed. Most teachers give students the criteria for judging student performance. The Visiting Team recommends that all teachers begin to share this information with their students in advance. The Visiting Team feels that there is ongoing school administrative support for increased access and use of data.

Leadership for School Improvement:

- a) *To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?*

The school has created a strong and positive learning environment in which teaching and learning are actively supported. The leadership team encourages and supports a range of teaching strategies including cooperative learning, individual projects, multimedia presentations, and exploration. The school maintains a constant and steady focus on student learning. Many opportunities are provided to students for remediation and extra help through during- and after-school programs. Staff members have the best interests of students in mind, as evidenced by the amount of one-on-one time spent with students.

- b) *To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative?*

The school does a good job of collaborating with all stakeholders in their decision-making process. Teachers, parents, and students all feel that their voices are listened to and heard by the leadership team as decisions are made. The Visiting Team found that student achievement data was limited to the IOWA, State Core tests, and AYP data. Data should be disaggregated so that the individual needs of students or groups of students can be addressed. Individual class data is not shared among other members of a department or across departments. The Visiting Team encourages the leadership team to continue to share data and base decisions on best practices, current research, disaggregated data, and input from all stakeholders.

- c) *To what extent does the school leadership monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness through a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection?*

The school does a good job of keeping students and parents informed of student progress through the online grading and attendance program, progress reports sent

home twice per term, and individual student and parent meetings. Staff members are required to update their grades weekly on the Internet.

There is currently no assessment system in place that links the curriculum to the DRSLs. The Visiting Team recommends that the leadership team develop a comprehensive assessment system that includes the assessment of the DRSLs.

- d) *To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment?*

The staff, parents, and students strongly commended the leadership team for the creation of a safe and positive learning environment. During interviews they repeatedly commended the school's leadership team for improving the school's climate and culture. School-wide policies and operational procedures are consistent with the school's beliefs and mission, and are designed to support student learning. There is strong evidence that the school has created and sustained a learning environment for students that nurtures a sense of caring and belonging.

- e) *To what extent does the school leadership make decisions related to the allocation and use of resources which align with the school goals, the achievement of the DRSLs, and school improvement efforts?*

One of the strengths of the school is the alignment of resources with school improvement efforts, student learning, and the achievement of the DRSLs.

- f) *To what extent does the school leadership empower the school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning?*

The Visiting Team recognized the positive and productive relationships that exist among students, teachers, support staff, administration, and parents. The school leadership encourages commitment, participation, and collaboration among all stakeholders. They have communicated to parents and the community at large that their input and participation is important to the success of the school. The administration is encouraged to continue building positive relationships with all groups.

Community Building:

- a) *To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?*

The Visiting Team saw evidence of community ties fostered by San Rafael Junior High's students, staff, administration, and parents. They have a very strong School Community Council that participates in the decision-making process of the school. Each of these groups commented on the positive relationships, and trust between the school and the community. The Visiting Team also found that people liked being at San Rafael Jr. High. There is a strong climate of community. Staff members, students, and parents all expressed pride in their community and in the school itself. The Visiting Team was impressed with the evidence that indicates most students feel they are a part of the school community and are invited to participate in school activities.

- b) *To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?*

The school has demonstrated a commitment to building a collaborative network of support with the school community and is seeking ways to improve parent participation, especially with parent-teacher conferences. The school has a website where parents and students may check individual class assignments and student progress, and it sends out a newsletter to parents informing them of upcoming events and dates. This is sent out at midterm and at the end of each term. The school works closely with local resources and business partners; for example, several community workers helped the school with the Reality Town project.

Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:

- a) *To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?*

The Visiting Team feels that the staff and administration are committed to professional development. Weekly faculty meetings are used for periodic professional development opportunities such as Life Span testing, Love and Logic Discipline, reading and writing strategies, and other presentations. The Visiting Team recommends that more money be provided for additional training, especially follow-up training in areas of greatest need.

- b) *To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?*

It is evident that the school's administration and staff actively support individual and staff opportunities for teacher development. In their self-study they indicate that more professional development is needed, and that it should be focused on meeting their specific needs for improvement. Finding and getting the people needed to help in this training has been a source of frustration. Much effort has

been put forth to help teachers better teach reading and writing across the curriculum.

CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS I-XI

Most Utah public junior high /middle schools are not accredited through NAAS, only by the USOE – it is their choice to join NAAS or not.

CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN

- a) *To what extent is the school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?*

The action plan addresses the major concerns identified in the self-study and profile data. Some of the action steps listed in each action plan have been in place for several years. The staff should reevaluate the effectiveness of these steps and explore alternative or additional programs or practices that would further the goals of the action plan.

- b) *To what extent is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?*

There appears to be a strong school-wide and system-wide commitment to the action plan by parents and staff. Students are not as fully committed, due largely to a lack of knowledge and understanding of the action plan. More should be done to involve and educate students about the action plan.

- c) *How sound does the follow-up process that the school intends to use for monitoring the accomplishments of the schoolwide action plan appear to be?*

The staff members have a clear understanding of what they need to accomplish through their action steps. These goals are important to the staff and community. They have a clear idea of how to accomplish these goals. Increased professional development around disaggregating data and linking their DRSLs to their lesson plans will be critical in achieving their goals as a school.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team recognized that the school and leadership team made a sincere effort to do a thorough analysis of the school's strengths and limitations, and commends them for this effort.
- The administration is to be commended for its support of the staff and its positive professional relationship with students, parents, and the community.
- The Visiting Team commends the school for the exemplary efforts made to keep students and parents informed about student progress.
- The Visiting Team commends the school for its efforts to create a positive and safe learning environment, holding high expectations for student learning, and having a staff characterized by caring educators willing to do whatever is necessary to help students succeed.
- The staff of San Rafael Junior High is to be commended for its use of a variety of instructional and assessment strategies to ensure that all students have an opportunity to learn.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends that the administration and staff work together to seek innovative ways of increasing time for professional development and opportunities for teachers to collaborate more formally and share best practices.
- The Visiting Team recommends that staff members and stakeholders revisit the DRSLs and identify measurable indicators as a foundation for formal assessments in order to monitor and measure student achievement of the DRSLs.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school develop a system to disaggregate both state and national norm-referenced test data by content cluster, gender, grade level, ethnicity, at-risk status, etc. to provide data that can be utilized to make judgments regarding academic growth by individual students or groups of students.
- The Visiting Team recommends increased emphasis on making more explicit connections between the curriculum and the DRSLs.